

February 18, 2016

Good evening Appropriations Committee Chairs and Members.

My name is Robyn Trowbridge. I am an Area Director at Residential Management Services, Inc.; a nonprofit located in Kensington; serving 201 individuals with intellectual disabilities who reside in 14 towns across the state. RMS employs 430 staff.

Serving as a voice for these 631 of your constituents is both a privilege and huge responsibility. I began working at RMS some 31 years ago and was involved as we as a state worked to improve the quality of life for many folks who lived in large institutional settings through creating expanded opportunities for them to live and contribute to their communities throughout Connecticut. It has been a wonderful evolution for many and within it, a source of great pride for your predecessors and mine. We have seen innumerable individuals thrive as a result of these efforts and go on to live extraordinarily happy lives.

We all, including each of you, I would guess, wish to spend our lives being cared about, safe, respected and valued. We want to have meaning in our lives, fulfilling relationships, practice our faith, have dignity within the opportunity to work and be present and contributing to our neighborhoods and greater communities. Those we serve desire and deserve the same quality opportunities and fulfillment within their lives, and critical to achieving these outcomes is the need for resource stability.

Within the confines of being supported through a formalized structure and system, those we serve remain, in some ways, disadvantaged within their level of liberty and personal freedom and they are counting on us to enliven their possibilities and futures and to assist in making real their dreams. These are basic desires and nearly universal in our collective definition of "living a meaningful life". Meeting this standard is our charge and within our collective effort to do this and do it well, stability of resources is essential, both for direct service needs of those served and for the sustainability of a professional long term workforce and the agency at large.

For our agency and for those we employ, there remains a persistent passion for serving those living in our programs. We face continued economic struggles to effectively manage the programs within the existing demands, resources and fiscal constraints and to provide our employees with competitive wages that allow them to remain stable in their employment while able to support their families adequately. Our employees are phenomenally hard working overall; they are often selfless and commit every day to making life better for those less fortunate than themselves. They do it because they love what they do, they find meaning within doing it and they care deeply for those they serve. It's crucial that we make them important because they are central to any lasting success for those we serve. We value our staff and those we serve and we are asking you to value them too.

I was in this room at a similar hearing when Representative Tercyak spoke powerfully about private group home staff being underpaid yet charged with the profound duty of protecting the

lives of those receiving services and I could not agree with him more. Yet beyond that, is the responsibility to provide them with a life worth living and I know we know they deserve that.

We understand the substantial costs associated with service provision yet cannot echo loud enough the devastating individual and systemic impact if the currently proposed budgets cuts are imposed. Staffing reductions, changes in workforce, lost relationships, cuts in opportunities for individuals to work and to participate in typical activities within their communities. These fundamental tenets of living are currently at risk if these budget cuts are supported and may take years to stabilize and be fully restored.

As advocates, it is our responsibility to make you aware of the impact of your decisions and what these cuts will mean for thousands of Connecticut's citizens for which you legislate and for whom the final outcome of this will leave an imprint of sustained or dramatically reduced possibility.

Please support us to support them.

Thank you

Robyn Trowbridge

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